

## Book reviews

### **Bio-ethics yearbook, vol 1: theological developments in bio-ethics 1988-1990**

Edited by B Andrew Lustig and others, Dordrecht, the Netherlands, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991, 224 pages, £63.00

This expensive book witnesses to the explosion in issues of medical ethics since the 1960s, and also to the extent and wealth of the American market. It is the first of what will be annual yearbooks, each alternating year dealing with theological issues in bio-ethics, and the intervening years covering governmental policies. It comes from the Centre for Ethics, Medicine and Public Issues, Houston, Texas.

Ten of the twelve chapters of this yearbook are by writers from America. They are printed in alphabetical order of author, so that Roman Catholic comes first, followed by Mormon. Then follow Hinduism, Buddhism, Anglicanism, Eastern Orthodoxy (in its Greek, not Russian, form), Islam, Lutheranism, Methodism, Baptist-Evangelicalism, Judaism and the Reformed Tradition. The Buddhist contribution is, rather surprisingly, from Japan. Missing are ecumenical contributions, which is a pity; though the Methodist contribution includes references to joint work with the Roman Catholic Church in the USA. Chinese faiths are not mentioned.

The sources are overwhelmingly American. The exceptions are the chapters on Buddhism and Hinduism, and that on Anglicanism. This last draws on the Lambeth Conference of 1988 and, oddly, on the Scottish Episcopal Church and the Church in Wales, but ignores the Church of England. The sources are mainly

official statements, but some less official work is included. Most chapters have extended bibliographies.

Many contributors provide a brief historical and doctrinal background to the substance of their chapter. They are in sympathy with their subject, but sympathy in several cases has not precluded criticism. The Roman Catholic contributor gives special attention to the 1987 Instruction from the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith, *On Respect for Human Life in its Origins and on the Dignity of Procreation (Donum Vitae)*. Such documents come with a considerable weight of disciplinary authority behind them; nevertheless this chapter considers both its arguments and also the criticisms of them from within the Roman Catholic Church itself, and concludes that the discussion is clearly not complete, and that further thought is needed. The Lutheran contributor says that his tradition has been a mixed blessing, for whilst it was a corrective to late mediaeval 'works righteousness', it introduced a suspicion of precise moral reasoning as being an enterprise of self-justification. The Baptist Evangelical contributor says that there is a lack of sophistication in evangelical moral reasoning, and a proneness to accept 'moral postures' about which no argument is permitted and no explanation required. Also the Mormon writer remarks that guidance from the Mormon Church is not prospective but tends to be issued when public debate is on the verge of ending, and then to conform to the general medical-social consensus.

These comments illustrate the problem that all, and not only religious, groups have to face in coping with a traditional morality fashioned in a pre-technological age.

The editors have maintained a fairly firm uniform framework for the chapters, which is an achievement in a

pioneer volume with protean subject matter. Naturally not all the contributors find material on every issue; but broadly, those covered are concerned with the origin and end of life, consent, confidentiality, equitable access to medical care, cost containment and organ transplantation. The editors express the hope that the book will be useful to teachers, doctors, nurses, clergy, lawyers and public-policy makers. Certainly if any of them need the material here there is no other equivalent source.

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### **Regulating British medicine: the General Medical Council**

Margaret Stacey, Chichester and New York, John Wiley, 1992, 293 pages, pb £15.95

This is a timely book. Since the advent in Britain in the 1980s of a new right-wing radicalism which emphasises consumerism, the manner in which professional bodies regulate the conduct of their members has been increasingly questioned from both sides of the political divide, as well as by self-critical members. Professor Margaret Stacey, a doyenne of sociology applied to healing and health, is particularly well placed to analyse the role and conduct of the General Medical Council in regulating the activities of the medical profession, in that she was a lay member of the council from 1976 to 1984. Her analysis avoids nicely the dangers which beset participant observers of, on the one hand, co-option by the